

CARLSBAD AVENUES

Let's talk about SPEED ZONES

The California Vehicle Code is based on the premise that, on the whole, most people drive responsibly. Happily, local, regional and national statistics support that assumption. Motorists generally drive at a reasonable speed for the conditions present on any given road. Accordingly, the City of Carlsbad sets realistic speed limits in the upper half of the normal pace of traffic to achieve voluntary public compliance and to maintain unambiguous enforcement of the law.

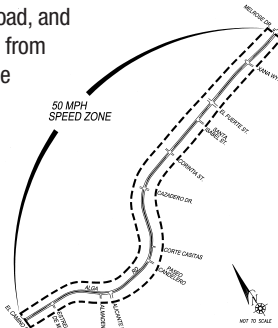
Carlsbad enforces California's Basic Speed Law, which states, "No person shall drive a vehicle upon a highway [road] at a speed greater than is reasonable or prudent having due regard for weather, visibility, the traffic on, and the surface and width of the highway, and in no event at a speed which endangers the safety of persons or property."

The rationale behind setting speed limits

At first glance, some posted speed limits may appear confusing or even arbitrary. Signs on Palomar Airport Road and on most portions of El Camino Real allow speeds up to 55 mph; then, on La Costa Avenue, east of El Camino Real, on Alga Road, and Aviara Parkway, posted speed limits range from 40-50 depending upon which stretch of the road the driver is traveling on.

Why so many different posted speed limits? The roads are divided into zones. Realistic speed limits are set for each zone, based on specific engineering and traffic surveys conducted on that designated (portion of) road. The engineering and traffic survey, which is required by the California Vehicle Code, takes many elements into account, such as:

- Collisions
- Roadway features
- Adjacent land uses
- Driveway locations
- Traffic volumes
- Pedestrian volumes
- Critical speed
- Horizontal and vertical road alignment
- Stopping sight distance
- Conditions not readily apparent to the driver



Alga Road 50 mph speed zone.



Some definitions

Critical Speed

The speed at which 85% of drivers travel at or below.

Maximum Speed Limit

In California, the maximum speed limit is 55 mph on a two-lane, undivided highway.



Absolute Limit

Selected freeways in California may be posted to permit a maximum of 65 or 70 mph. This is an absolute limit that may not be legally exceeded under any circumstance.

Prima Facie Speed Limit

This Latin phrase means "on the face of it." A prima facie limit is deemed reasonable and prudent under normal conditions. The prima facie limit is 15 mph in alleys, blind intersections and blind railroad crossings, 25 mph in business and residential districts. There also is a part-time prima facie limit of 25 mph in posted school zones when school is in session.

Drivers may exceed a prima facie limit if it is safe to do so. If cited, however, they must prove they were driving in a reasonable and prudent manner according to existing conditions. The absolute limit, however, may not be exceeded.

The Carlsbad Police Department rigorously enforces all speed limits



Six motor enforcement officers are charged with the responsibility of enforcing speed limits. The survey-based realistic speed limits established by the City's traffic engineering staff make it easier for the Police Department to enforce the law using radar. The posted speed limits on arterial roads provide motorists, police and the traffic courts with clear guidelines for reasonable and safe speeds while facilitating efficient traffic flow under normal driving conditions.

In the zone

Artificially or arbitrarily lowering the speed limit on a designated street could result in a “solution” that is worse than the problem, explains Deputy City Engineer Bob Johnson, who has dealt with complex traffic engineering issues during his 19-year career with the City of Carlsbad. “For instance, if we lowered the speed limit on Palomar Airport Road from 55 to 45 or 50 mph, we would be going against the results of the engineering and traffic survey that established and supports the realistic speed limit as 55 mph. We would thus create an illegal speed zone and could not use radar to enforce the limit. A police officer would have to resort to the time-consuming, cumbersome method of pacing to ‘catch’ someone traveling at a speed excessively over the speed limit, say 65-70 mph.”



In accordance with the American legal system, laws – including those regulating speed zones – cannot be effectively enforced without the consent and voluntary compliance of the majority of the people.



Ironically, says Johnson, lowering a speed limit below what is reasonable, prudent and safe on a street could have the unintended outcome of allowing reckless motorists to drive even faster, instead of slower, on that street!

That said, Johnson stresses that caution and prudence must always be exercised to help ensure safety for all: motorists, passengers, pedestrians and others on the road. He advises, “Traffic conditions always dictate that drivers comply with the Basic Speed Law, which says driving speeds should be safe and reasonable for the current road condition.”



No published research has established any direct relationship between posted speed limits and frequency of collisions.



Setting speed limits lower than the 85th percentile critical speed makes many reasonable drivers “illegal.” According to one Automobile Club of Southern California study, increasing the speed limit from the 85th percentile of 40 mph to 45 mph “legalized” an additional 10% of drivers, whereas decreasing it to 35 mph made almost three times that number – 28% – of drivers “illegal.”

Truth and consequences

Would you believe that, in some cases, many motorists may actually drive slower, not faster, after a speed limit is increased? Research conducted by the State of California and other agencies may surprise you. Consider these myths and facts.

The myths ...

Contrary to popular misconception, installing speed limit signs will not:

- Slow down traffic,
- Decrease accidents, or
- Increase safety.



In addition:

Raising a posted speed limit will not significantly increase the speed of traffic.

The facts ...

Research has demonstrated that setting a realistic speed limit in the upper half of the normal pace of traffic (i.e., the critical speed) will achieve:

- Voluntary compliance,
- Clear identification of violators, and
- Meaningful, unambiguous enforcement.

A FINAL NOTE:

Changing speed limits does not alter driving habits

According to experts, most people drive at speeds with which they feel comfortable.

Further Information and Involvement

If you would like further information on speed zones and related topics, we invite you to:

- Contact Deputy City Engineer Bob Johnson at 602-2752.
- Call the Carlsbad Police Department's Traffic Division at 931-2290.
- Visit the City's website at www.ci.carlsbad.ca.us.
- Call 434-2808 to sign up for the Carlsbad Citizens' Academy.

If you would like to observe and/or participate in the process, we invite you to:

- Attend a Traffic Safety Commission meeting, generally held on the first Monday of each month at 3 pm in the Council Chambers, 1200 Carlsbad Village Drive.
- Learn about applying for membership on this or other volunteer advisory boards and commissions by calling the City Clerk at 434-2808.
- Attend a regularly scheduled City Council meeting, generally held on Tuesdays at 6 pm in the Council Chambers.
- Call 434-2820 to confirm above dates and times and to get more information on how you can help direct the avenues of your city's policies and programs.

